

Strolling The Shore Of A Shrunken Reservoir



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

This image, taken from a drone flying about 200 feet above Phillips Reservoir near Baker City, shows Mason Dam. Most of the snow-covered area at right is usually underwater but has been exposed as the reservoir, due to demand for irrigation water and a drought, has receded. It is holding about 8% of its capacity.

TEMPORARY TRAILS

I like to walk where, on a majority of days in any given year, I would splash. Or swim.

It is the nature of reservoirs to recede seasonally.

And reservoirs in our arid region can shrink as dramatically as a wool sweater washed in hot water, especially when drought and heavy demand for irrigation water coincide.

Which is to say, summer.

A proximate example of the phenomenon, and one I visit often, is Phillips Reservoir.

The reservoir, which sprawls across 2,400 acres when full, impounds the Powder River at the eastern end of the Sumpter Valley, about 15 miles south-west of Baker City.

Phillips is not full now.

Indeed it is far closer to empty, holding about 8% of its capacity.

The reservoir's recession has revealed a swath of land that typically is submerged.

I am forever intrigued by the chance to go to places that are normally off limits, to hike what are in effect temporary trails.

A whole lot of trails, in this case.

Albeit trails that follow precisely the same route and are separated by just a few inches.

As reservoirs slowly subside — and Phillips, being rather larger than, say, a bathtub, doesn't empty rapidly — the waves erode the shoreline and create a series of sinuous benches that resemble, from a distance, the bleachers in a foot-



ON THE TRAIL

JAYSON JACOBY

ball stadium, albeit curved rather than straight.

Altitude as well as distance accentuates this effect, something I was pleased to experience on a recent Sunday excursion to the reservoir:

I brought a new toy.

Except the Mavic Mini drone is somewhat more sophisticated than that word, toy, implies.

Toys, at least the ones that I have been acquainted with, can't fly 400 feet above the ground and figure out how to return to their takeoff spot if the operator gets confused.

(As I often do even when I have but two dimensions to deal with — relaxing on a sofa, for instance.)

I've scarcely begun to tap the drone's prodigious capabilities.

Like as not I never will delve much beyond the basic operations. But I'm satisfied simply flying the thing around and marveling at the new perspective it affords on familiar places.

(Its gimbal-mounted camera takes videos as well as photographs.)

Once the drone was safely back in its case — or as safe as my acquisitions can be; I've proved quite capable of damaging items even when they're perfectly still — we started hiking west along the reservoir's south shore.

My wife, Lisa, and our son, Max, and daughter, Olivia, found a stump that had been transformed by hoarfrost into



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

Hoar frost decorates an old stump recently revealed by receding Phillips Reservoir.

a fetching, whimsical sculpture.

It occurred to me that this stump, its base just a few inches above the water, probably has been submerged very nearly constantly since Mason Dam was finished in 1967 and the Powder's water began filling the valley.

The reservoir has dropped as low as it is now in fewer than 10 autumns since it first filled.

It was a fine day for a hike, sunny with a breeze that was brisk but not frigid. The reservoir, not yet frozen into its customary winter gray, showed off its range of colors — nearly green from some angles but a deep cobalt from the elevated vantage point of the drone.



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald

A wide swath of shoreline has been exposed as Phillips Reservoir dropped during the summer and early fall.

The south shore is the better side to explore the reservoir's rarely revealed shore, I think. The slopes are a bit steeper and the resulting topography more interesting, smooth and sandy stretches interrupted by boulder fields.

As I walk along I wonder what the Powder River canyon looked like before it was inundated.

The south side also affords expansive views, across the water, of the Elkhorn Mountains, including the range's apex, Rock Creek Butte. The 9,106-foot peak, which can seem a relatively modest summit from certain direc-

tions, is from the reservoir quite imposing, with the pyramidal shape that reminds me of the mountain silhouettes that form the backdrop of Roadrunner cartoons.

The easiest way to get to the shoreline is to drive across Mason Dam and park on the south side. Drive Highway 7 south from Baker City and turn left onto the Black Mountain Road, No. 1145, just beyond Milepost 35. The dam is just a few hundred yards from the highway.

This route might not be accessible if logging crews aren't plowing the Black Mountain Road.

Turkey stew, and an inspiring magazine still going strong

As a grade school kid I'd read the "Fur-Fish-Game" magazine and dream of being a mountain man. No, read probably isn't the right word. Devour would be the correct word. I'd read the articles about the old trappers up in Canada and of their lifestyles. In summer they'd go out in the woods, build a cabin, pack in supplies, cut a winter's worth of firewood and then when the winter snows hit, they'd slap on a pair of snowshoes and set a trapline. They'd trap all winter and come out in the spring and sell their hides which they'd scraped and stretched on the long winter nights in the cabin.

In junior high with my paper route earnings I bought some of the old A.R. Harding books that were advertised in FFG. In some of the books the old timers would talk about processing their moose, which would provide their meat for



BASE CAMP

TOM CLAYCOMB

the upcoming winter. But, they also made a big deal out of saving the bones which they'd boil down to make a broths and stews. You can visualize how they made their stew. At daylight before they took off to run their traplines they'd load up a Dutch oven with moose bones, canned vegetables and snow and put it on the fireplace. After running their trapline all day they'd come home at dusk to a hot pot of stew.

Then, nine or 10 years ago, I was helping a store up in Haines, Alaska, during the Canadian Thanksgiving spree. One day a young lady pulled up to the back of the store and asked if we could cut

up her moose bones for her to make stew. We shrugged our shoulders and said sure. She opened her van and there was a whole moose carcass in back laying on a tarp. She took all of the cut-up bones back to her cabin to make stews and broths for the winter.

So, I guess these backdrops are what prompted me to save the bones/fat off of our Thanksgiving turkey and try to make a stew. Boy, am I glad that I did. Turkey stew has now come to be almost as enjoyable as eating the actual turkey itself. Plus, it's super easy to make.

INGREDIENTS

Ever since I've been making turkey stew, but I doubt that I've ever used the same recipe. I'll list the general ingredients that I use but feel free to improvise to your family's liking. I suppose that you can throw in pretty much anything on

up to the proverbial kitchen sink.

Here's how I make it. I'll throw in the turkey bones/fat, sliced potatoes, squash, tomato, onion and for sure cilantro. Cilantro is a key ingredient. I also slice up one or two jalapenos to add a little spice and then garlic, salt and pepper. I go light on the salt and let everyone add what they prefer when served. There's nothing sacred about following my exact recipe. Tweak it to what sounds good to you or what ingredients that you have handy. Cook until the vegetables are done. You won't believe how good it is.

Maybe I'm too much of a mountain man/cowboy but it tastes best when cooked in a Lodge Dutch oven. For cooking at home, I use a Dutch oven without legs. They're easier to use on the stove top or in the oven without legs.

I know you're thinking that there has to be more to it than this. Nope,

it's that simple.

So, this Thanksgiving when you carve up your turkey don't throw away the bones and fat. Bag them up and freeze them so you can later make some turkey stew. Even on a smaller turkey you'll have enough scraps to make two batches and can stretch it out to three or four batches on a large bird.

Take a moment to give thanks for all of your many blessings. It always improves my outlook on life when I focus on all the blessings I have instead of the one or two things that I don't have.

SIDE NOTE

FFG is still going strong. In fact, I have an article in the November issue which is currently on the shelves. If you want to check out some of the old A.R. Harding books contact FFG or look on pages 40 and 44 in the current issue.